

Culture & Family Relationships

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Families do not develop their ways of communication and relating in a vacuum. How family members treat and relate to one another are influenced by many factors including the cultural milieu in which they are embedded. This milieu includes the family's ethnicity, class, religion, and geographic location. As McGolderick (1995) notes, "No matter what your background is, in effect it is multicultural" (p. 262).

Cultural attitudes vary greatly toward life, sex, food, men, women, children, the elderly, birth, and death. The strength of cultural influences on a family will depend on the family's particular pattern of migration, religion, socioeconomic status, education, type of work, geographic location, and the ethnic group's place in the larger society.

Rituals

Different cultures emphasize different rituals around holidays, marriages, funerals, and reunions. The norms and expectations about these different rituals can be the source of considerable conflict in families when the merging of different cultural influences through marriage generates different perspectives about how to approach and carry out these various rituals.

Time & Space

Some cultural groups live primarily in the present, others pay more attention to the past, while still others emphasize the importance of the future. Depending on their orientation to time, family members will view their history and relationships quite differently. In addition, different cultural groups treat space differently. For instance, the flow and shift of distance between family members as they interact are governed in part by the prevailing cultural norms in the family (Hall, 1966).

Money

Different cultural groups stress different values about money. Money may represent love, security, pride, power, shame, fear, and many other things depending on the cultural group involved. From this perspective, money is highly symbolic and represents not only the deeply held values of family members, but also reflects their fundamental cultural orientation in life.

References

- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York: Anchor Books.
McGoldrick, M. (1995). *You can go home again*. New York: W.W. Norton.